



FACT SHEET

Module 17 Avoid Aggressive Driving Behaviors

Lane blocking. Don't block the passing lane. Stay out of the far left lane and yield to the right for any vehicle that wants to overtake you. If someone demands to pass, allow them to do so.

Tailgating. Maintain a safe distance from the vehicle in front of you. Dozens of deadly traffic altercations began when one driver tailgated another.

Signal use. Don't switch lanes without first signaling your intention, and make sure you don't cut someone off when you move over. After you've made the maneuver, turn your signal off.

Gestures. You are playing Russian roulette if you raise a middle finger to another driver. Obscene gestures have gotten people shot, stabbed, or beaten in every state.



Horn use. Use your horn sparingly. If you must get someone's attention in a non-emergency situation, tap your horn lightly. Think twice before using your horn to say "hello" to a passing pedestrian; the driver in front of you may think you are honking at him. Don't blow your horn at the driver in front of you the second the light turns green. If a stressed-out motorist is on edge, the noise may set him off. Scores of shootings began with a driver honking the horn.

Failure to turn. In most areas right-hand turns are allowed after a stop at a red light. Avoid the right-hand lane if you are not turning right.

Parking. Do not take more than one parking space and do not park in a handicapped parking space if you are not handicapped. Don't allow your door to strike an adjacent parked vehicle. When parallel parking, do not tap the other vehicles with your own. *Look* before backing up.

Headlight use. Keep headlights on low beam, except where unlighted conditions require the use of high beams. Dim your lights for oncoming traffic; don't retaliate to oncoming high beams with your own in order to "teach them a lesson." Don't approach a vehicle from the rear with high beams and dim your lights as soon as a passing vehicle is alongside.

Merging. When traffic permits, move out of the right-hand acceleration lane of a freeway to allow vehicles to merge from the on-ramps.

Blocking traffic. If you are pulling a trailer or driving a cumbersome vehicle that impedes traffic behind you, pull over when you have the opportunity so that motorists behind you can pass. Also, do not block the road while talking to a pedestrian on the sidewalk. Dozens of shootings suggest that this behavior irritates a lot of people.

Car phones. Don't let the car phone become a distraction — keep your eyes and attention on the road. Car phones can be great for security but bad for safety. In addition, car phone users are widely perceived as being poor drivers and as constituting a traffic hazard. The data clearly show that aggressive drivers hate fender-benders with motorists who were talking on their cell phones.

Alarms. If you have an antitheft alarm on your vehicle, be sure you know how to turn it off. When buying an alarm, select one that turns off after a short period of time.

Displays. Confederate flags on pickup trucks are not a good idea. Refrain from showing any type of bumper sticker or slogan that could be offensive; this might include an "IM RICH" license plate.

Eye Contact. If a hostile motorist tries to pick a fight, do not make eye contact. This can be seen as a challenging gesture and incite the other driver to violence. Instead, get out of the way but do not acknowledge the other driver. If a motorist pursues you, do not go home. Instead, drive to a police station, convenience store, or other location where you can get help and there will be witnesses.

Reduce Your Own Stress

Traffic stress — indeed, anger in general — is hazardous to your health. The stress from road congestion is a major contributing factor to violent traffic disputes. Making a few simple changes in the way you approach driving can significantly reduce your stress level in the car.

Consider altering your schedule to avoid the worst congestion. Allow plenty of time so that you do not have to speed, beat traffic lights, or roll through stop signs. Think — is it really the end of the world if you are a bit late? Could you plan your day so you could leave a little earlier?

Improve the comfort of your vehicle. Use your air conditioner, install a tape or CD player to enjoy uninterrupted music or books on tape, and get a pillow or seat cover to make your seat more comfortable. Listen to classical music or any music that reduces your anxiety; avoid anger-inducing talk radio, for example.

While in traffic, concentrate on being relaxed. Don't clench your teeth. Loosen your grip on the wheel, take a deep breath, and do limited exercises and stretches for your arms and legs.

Don't drive when you are angry, upset, or overtired.

Most importantly, understand that you can't control the traffic but you *can* control your reaction to it.

Adjust Your Attitude

Give the other driver the benefit of the doubt. Assume that other drivers' mistakes are not intentional and are not personal. Be polite and courteous, even if the other driver isn't; it's better to err on the side of caution.

Before reacting to another driver's mistake, ask yourself, "How many times have I made the same mistake?" Before initiating or responding violently to a traffic situation, ask yourself, "Is it worth being paralyzed or killed? Is it worth the time and money for a lawsuit? Is it worth a jail sentence?" Remember, split-second impulsive actions can ruin the rest of your life.

Encased in metal armor, many motorists who are normally passive become enraged road warriors when they get behind the wheel. Don't become one of them. These individuals should be advised that (a) vehicle license plates can be reported to the sheriff; (b) another driver can follow you home; and (c) you've got to get out of the car some time.

Avoid conflict if possible. If you are challenged, take a deep breath and get out of the way, even if you are right. You don't want to be dead right. Instead, try being more forgiving and tolerant. Recognize the absurdity of traffic disputes and focus on what is really important in life. You cannot fight every battle. Save your energy — and your life — for something worthwhile.